

Rachel Winchester [00:00:01]:

If you're a homeschooling parent, you've probably heard the question, what co-op are you with? Oftentimes, people conflate homeschooling in community with being in a co-op or official program. In this episode, we're unpacking some of the details of the Homeschool Made Simple approach and how to foster a sense of community without compromising your educational philosophy. You're listening to the Homeschool Made Simple podcast with Carole Joy Seid. This is a podcast to help you homeschool simply, inexpensively, and enjoyably. Carole has been helping families homeschool for several decades now, and I'm Rachel Winchester, fellow homeschool mom and director of operations here at Homeschool Made Simple. Today, Carole and I are answering questions we've recently gotten from listeners like you on the topics of unschooling, co-ops, and community. Listen in.

Rachel Winchester [00:00:51]:

Well, we are back with the lovely Carole Joy Seid, and I'm staring at her beautiful sun hat because she's being very rebellious and sitting outside while we record. Tell everybody.

Carole Joy Seid [00:01:05]:

I can't help it. It is so beautiful that it is irresistible. I'm sitting in the pergola behind Sabbath rest, and I'm sitting with my lavender topiary trees in 2 pots. And then the wisteria is climbing over the pergola, and then the dahlias are coming up behind me. And on the side is purple on my white fence. I am living the dream over here, girl, and my apple tree is already showing apples. Wow. Imagine that.

Rachel Winchester [00:01:39]:

You are living the dream.

Carole Joy Seid [00:01:41]:

I know. I know. So, anyway, I just could not do this inside. I'm sorry. I repent, but I had to be outside today. And the birds are going out of their minds. It's just glorious.

Rachel Winchester [00:01:55]:

Well, today, we're just gonna do a little q and a, answer a few questions that we have gotten or that we get periodically, and just do a little rapid fire answering of some questions. So our first one is, what is the difference between your philosophy and, quote, unschooling? Is this a form of unschooling?

Carole Joy Seid [00:02:41]:

Okay. That's a great question. I would say it is not the same, and yet there are some similarities. So unschooling is a term that was created by one of the founders of the homeschool movement. So doctor Raymond Moore and John Holt were the 2 founders of the modern day American homeschool movement. When John Holt coined that term, he had written many, many books on how to save the public school system. He was an educator and a researcher like Dr. Moore, both of them coming from kinda similar backgrounds, actually.

But he, after writing many books, finally gave up and said the public school system is broken, and it cannot be fixed. And so he became an advocate for homeschooling, particularly un unschooling, which is the idea that you set this incredible buffet for your children, and then you get completely out of the way and let them educate themselves. So he said, you know, get scrap lumber and tools and all sorts of cooking supplies and sand and electrical components and different things that they can take apart, old alarm clocks, old toasters, whatever it is that your child is interested in and passionate about, but has never really had the time to do. And so tinkering, whittling, pursuing music to a very high creative level, dance, different physical activities, gymnastics, horseback riding, animal care, whatever it is.

So John Holt believed that if you leave children in a rich environment, they will pursue their own interests, and they will teach themselves anything that they need to know. And doctor Moore used a lot of that same philosophy, but doctor Moore believed in more structure. And his wife Dorothy in particular was a very disciplined person. She had a schedule that she would recommend to us. She would say things to us like, children need to know when they're going to eat. They need to know when they're going to sleep. They need to have predictability in their schedule and in the flow of their day. She said that would make children feel safe and nurtured and cared for, that they weren't running the asylum.

So Dr. Moore and Mr. Holt came from a different theological perspective, and I would say it is the difference between the concept of children being broken, coming out of the womb with original sin versus the concept of children, the humanistic concept that children are innately good.

And so I would say doctor Morris' method is more of a children under parental guidance. John Holt's method was more children being left to themselves.

In the book of Proverbs, it says, a child left to themselves will bring their mother's shame. And so I think there's a difference in theology that comes out in practice.

So it is a very different approach, and yet I think that we can learn a great deal from each other. We're not each other's enemies. I think the unschoolers can learn a great deal from Dr. Moore's philosophy and Charlotte Mason's philosophy, but those of us who follow Dr. Moore and Charlotte Mason's philosophies can also learn a great deal from the unschooling methodology where we allow our children to pursue their own interests instead of always pursuing our agenda, which may not be a good fit for our children and actually may restrict them and restrain them unnecessarily.

So I think that as our Pastor Chuck used to say, Chuck Smith in California, he used to say the truth lies somewhere between the two banks of the river, that the stream flows, you know, between the two banks. And so it's our tendency to fall off the horse on either side. Mhmm. But the truth lays in the middle, and I think that's the the same with educating our kids, not with too much structure, but also not without any.

Rachel Winchester [00:07:19]:

Yeah. And I think that within ourselves, we have a tendency either to be someone who falls more toward the unschooling. Like, I'm just naturally bent toward letting my kids explore and everything and have freedom. And so I have to correct myself by bringing into alignment. And then there's other of us who we are naturally more rigid, and so we have to come off of that rigidity so much so that we can actually give that freedom. But knowing yourself to know which one do I lean toward so that I can correct that, bring it into balance a little bit more.

Carole Joy Seid [00:07:55]:

That's why it's good to rub shoulders with people of every stripe. And I think, historically, Dr. Moore really encouraged us to be friends with people who don't necessarily know the Lord and are homeschooling, and that we can all learn from each other. And I think it's good for them to associate with us if we're loving and gracious and not rigid and and hateful and pharisaical. We learn every day as homeschoolers. We don't have this little compartmentalized, this is what we do and don't confuse me with anything else. But we're always learning, always growing, always adding to our palette. And I think that's how you make the best artist and the best parent as well.

Rachel Winchester [00:08:39]:

And a little bit more about the question of just the philosophy. If it's a Venn diagram. You know, it's like we share a little bit with unschooling, but we also share with classical education of, you know, we want our kids exposed and to be familiar with history and the great authors and to be able to enter into the great conversation and to have that

understanding. It's just that we're saying, let's do it in a balanced developmentally appropriate way, not just jump all in hook, line, and sinker from kindergarten on.

Carole Joy Seid [00:09:16]:

When I hear the word classical education, to me, what that means is reading the classics. So reading great books. Some classically educated children and some models are not using literature as their core, and that is where I very much differ with them. But I love the idea of teaching Latin to children. I prefer that you wait for high school to formally teach Latin, but I do recommend that for all my high school kids. And in junior high, I like for children to study Greek and Latin roots to prepare them for education in terms of spelling, in terms of word attack skills, and future educational study in the romance and Teutonic languages. So I love, you know, some of the methodology of the classical model.

I differ with them in age appropriateness and, you know, there's some other issues that I don't agree with. So, again, we still always wanna be learning, open-minded, but sticking with where, you know, running our own race. What is in our spirit when we have been studying these things as a mom doing our research or a dad, Where has our spirit borne witness?

Rachel Winchester [00:11:20]:

So in light of this, this seems like it might connect to the idea of co-ops because knowing your philosophy and stuff really matters in that regard. So this question is, "What is your opinion on co ops? I feel like everyone who homeschools does this. I think they're less for kids benefit educationally and more for moms to connect. What is your opinion? Are they helpful in families, or what is your opinion on those?"

Carole Joy Seid [00:11:46]:

That's another great question. We have such smart families. So I would say that co-ops can be a blessing and a gift, or they can be a burden and actually really separate you from your child. And so how can we walk that fine line? My feeling is a co op should be for something that is just pure enrichment, like an art class or a conversational Spanish class. It's just pure fun. Or drama class or gym. I mean, you know, my grandchildren go to this marvelous gym program that they've all grown up going to with the same teacher. He's a fabulous man.

Those are things to me that are better served away from home. But something like literature or history, particularly the humanities, are, I believe, really well served in the home. And so I don't want families farming their kids out for their academic time.

Maybe in high school, I very much encourage them to farm them out for high school science, like a lab science, or for some families, math as well because they just feel like, I'm gonna quit if I have to do math at home. And, like, you don't need to quit. Just send your kids to a math class. There's no shame in that. Junior colleges are great for that type of thing too as your kids get older.

Some states call it PSEO, dual enrollment, where you're getting college credit at the junior college while you're in high school. So that's different. But when your kids are growing up, keep them close to home. If your kids are going to a co op a day or 2 a week, and then all they're doing is homework from that co op, that's really not homeschooling. It's kind of the worst of both worlds because if you sent your children to school, you know that the thing you hate the most is overseeing someone else's homework assignments. Nothing is worse than that. You don't like what they're doing. You think it's not even worthwhile.

You don't understand the assignment. You wind up doing it for the child. That is why we don't send our kids to school, one of the many reasons. So why would you call this homeschooling when you're simply overseeing someone else's homework assignment? That is, please send your kids to school if you're gonna do that. But if you're farming them out for something that's a ton of fun, like my grandchildren are, in plays that are just beyond description. They're so fabulous. A woman from our church runs this program. There's a waiting list, so don't get your hopes up that you're gonna get into it.

But it's unbelievable. When the kids are interviewed in the little program, what's your favorite thing about Playhouse Theater? They're like, the relationships, the way we encourage each other. They're growing up with this extended family of the parents and the kids, and they're all working together on something they're really proud of, and it's really fun, and it brings character development. And that to me is a worthwhile endeavor. But don't send your kids somewhere to read a book with other people. I mean, I just don't see the the value in that, and I think you're giving up your god given authority and influence in your child's life, which is one of the big reasons that we homeschool. Don't don't pass that off. And people the the question also referred to the idea of community, and I do hear this with a lot of my families.

They tell me, well, we're in this program or that program. We don't really like it, but it gives us community. And then I always say, you know me, I'm so opinionated. Oh, so you're paying to have friends? That's really sad. Is there not an easier way to have friends than that? Doing something you don't even like just so that people will be friends with you? What if you start a park day where everyone is involved at every

different philosophical juncture in your relationship, believers, unbelievers, however you wanna do it, and create community that way or in an extracurricular, which is fun based instead of boring, dry, stressful stuff in order to have friends. I just don't think that's the homeschool model. It never has been, and it really never should be.

Rachel Winchester [00:16:06]:

Yeah. That's great. And it kind of answers the next question I was gonna ask you, which is "After connecting through my local church, how do you recommend I connect to other local family homeschool families?" So really just using those things that are pure, fun or organizing something that doesn't really matter if the philosophical alignment is there as much to then spend time together and provide that friendship.

Carole Joy Seid [00:16:32]:

That's right. And keeping in mind that your children don't need a whole huge amount of close friends, but they need do need 2 or 3 close friends. And so being intentional. And the smaller your family is, the more intentional you may need to be because big families don't need your kids, but your kids need their kids. And so saying, well, we'll drive, we'll pick up and bring home. We'll feed and clothe your children. We'll do whatever it takes because we need your kids. Particularly with only children, it's just so important that they not feel isolated and lonely because now you're dealing with a child who's depressed And that's way bigger of an issue than what do we use for algebra.

Really being intentional and not being shy and coy, like, yeah, let's get together sometime. No. No. No. What are you doing Tuesday afternoon, and can you all come over for lunch, or can we meet at a park so nobody's house gets destroyed? And the moms will sit and talk, and the kids will have free reign to play football as they're bigger and, you know, whatever it is that would bring community. So often, I think we look for something that we want, and we go all the way around the mountain instead of being very direct. Like, well, we just want friends. Well, then why do kids have to take these classes that they hate in order to have friends? If you wanna have friends, Solomon said, then show yourself friendly.

So why can't we do a family barbecue on Sunday after church and invite another homeschool family? And the parents become friends because in the book these 2 men wrote this book, Hold On to Your Kids. They're not even believers, but they say something that has so much wonderful value. They say, make friends of adults, and then make your children friends with their children. Because you know these people. You know what goes on in their home. You know what movies your child might be exposed to or even what food they're gonna be served or whatever your concerns are

of your children being away from home. If it's a family where the parents are your best friends, now you feel very differently about your child spending the day there or even the night there. And some families just say, we don't do overnights, and I completely understand that in the world we live in.

But however you wanna interact with these children, know the parents before you know the children, and I think that builds natural bridges. I was raised in a culture very much like that where my parents were in a club and their friends were all in this club, married couples, and then as a result all of us children grew up like cousins. And some of those adults we even called aunt and uncle because we felt so close to these folks, and we all grew up together. And just the beauty that comes from your parents being friends, and as a result, then the children are friends. That's the way to build community.

Rachel Winchester [00:19:27]:

Yeah. And I read that in hold on to your kids, and it was like a light bulb moment for me because I was noticing the difference between how I felt about and how I was experiencing relationships that my children had. Like, we knew the kid, but we didn't know the parents. And it wasn't a parent to parent relationship. And there's a huge difference in the way that that unravels.

Carole Joy Seid [00:19:54]:

The trust level is not there.

Rachel Winchester [00:19:56]:

Mhmm. Yeah. Awesome. Well, I think these will be great help to people as they listen.

You've been listening to the Homeschool Made Simple podcast. If you have questions you'd like to hear answered on the podcast, visit our website, homeschoolmadesimple.net/ideas, and let us know what you have on your mind.

Thanks for joining us this week on the Homeschool Made Simple podcast. Remember, Jesus' commandments are not burdensome. What he calls you to do, he will enable you to do. Blessings.